



## **Alaska Fish Tested For Mercury, Get Clean Bill of Health**

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Anchorage - Friday Governor Frank H. Murkowski announced the results of a study conducted by the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation seafood and food safety laboratory that shows mercury levels are very low in the most frequently consumed fish from Alaska. Mercury levels in wild Alaska salmon are among the lowest found.

Murkowski said the study is important because of the national focus on mercury levels in fish. Recent national fish advisories that recommended limiting consumption of fish did not take into account evidence of the low levels of mercury in Alaska fish, especially wild Alaska salmon.

"These results reinforce what we've known all along---that Alaska's fish are not only very tasty, healthy and full of important nutrients, but they are safe to eat, especially wild Alaska salmon," Murkowski said.

During the first two years of the study more than 500 samples of marine and fresh water fish taken from Alaska waters were tested for heavy metals, including mercury. Mercury, a naturally occurring heavy metal, accumulates in fish and marine mammals. It is also released into the air through coal burning and industrial pollution. Analysis of the Alaska samples revealed low levels of all heavy metal contaminants tested. The data were consistent with the results of other studies and previous sampling and analysis performed by ADEC.

ADEC's seafood and food safety laboratory tested more than 500 samples of salmon (all five species), halibut, pacific cod, sablefish, rockfish, lingcod, pollock, pike, and sheefish. Marine fish samples were collected from the Bering Sea, Gulf of Alaska, and Southeast waters. The Alaska Department of Fish and Game, the International Pacific Halibut Commission, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and Native fishermen provided the fish samples.

According to the Alaska Division of Public Health, the concentrations of heavy metals detected in these samples of wild Alaska fish are not a public health

concern. The data support the Division's recommendation that all Alaskans, including pregnant women, women of childbearing age, and young children, continue unrestricted consumption of fish from Alaska waters.

Extensive research has documented the numerous health, social, cultural, and economic benefits of eating wild Alaska fish. Eating fish provides inexpensive and readily available nutrients, vitamins, essential fatty acids, antioxidants, calories, and protein that contribute to significant health benefits. Proven health benefits include protection from cardiovascular disease and diabetes, improved maternal nutrition and neonatal and infant brain development. Taken in conjunction with the Alaska Division of Public Health's maternal hair mercury monitoring program, these data confirm that human exposure to mercury is low among Alaskans.

DEC began testing fish two years ago to fortify earlier limited studies with a broader sample size to include more species and more locations. Samples were tested for heavy metals (mercury, arsenic, chromium, nickel, selenium, lead, cadmium). A subset is being analyzed for dioxins and furans, pesticides, PCB congeners, inorganic arsenic, and chromium VI. Those results will be available later this fall.

According to DEC's state veterinarian Bob Gerlach, DEC will continue to qualify data with physical parameters, such as age, size and weight, and will make those results available as they become validated. Samples will continue to be collected to verify the safety of consuming Alaska's fish.

#### Related information:

[Results of the fish monitoring study](#)

[Information on the Statewide Maternal Hair Mercury Monitoring Program](#)

[Epidemiology Bulletin No. 6, June 15 2001 Recommendations for Fish Consumption in Alaska](#)

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